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AUTHOR Hilton, Chadwick B.
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ABSTRACT

The role of English language training in Japan's move toward corporate internationalization is addressed, particularly in terms of the importance of English, the nature and quality of training, and the ramifications of that training regarding global competition. It is noted that the Japanese language is not suited for the sort of confrontation, debate, and negotiation typical of common non-Japanese business situations. English training in both pre-college and college education, although given priority status, does not produce the English communication skills essential for effective international managers and corporate representatives. Because Japanese companies see themselves in a global context, functional "communicative" English skills are important. An in-house English training program in a multinational steel company is described that uses native English speakers and emphasizes a high level of technical expertise; international communication skills; awareness of the host country conditions concerning politics, law, business, capital, and labor; and awareness of the host country's basic structures. Exhibits are appended to this essay with further details on the company's program. It is concluded that the Japanese are succeeding globally because they have a global vision that includes, among other things, a strategy for corporate English training. This training is seen as an example of long-range commitment, flexibility, and the recognition of the importance of human capital. Contains 10 references. (LB)

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ENGLISH: A CRUCIAL ELEMENT IN JAPAN'S DRIVE TOWARD INTERNATIONALIZATION

Chadwick B. Hilton
Dept. of Management & Marketing
The University of Alabama
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0225

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ENGLISH: A CRUCIAL ELEMENT IN JAPAN'S DRIVE TOWARD INTERNATIONALIZATION

In "Language as a 'Weapon': What Does English Mean to Japanese?"(1987), Takao Suzuki makes the point that Japan was rendered all but militarily defenseless by the Peace Constitution implemented following World War II. This situation resulted in language and information becoming for modern Japan "not only a means to deter disputes and avoid confrontations-equivalent to military preparedness in some other countries-but . . . also the only means left . . . to reach an early settlement of conflicts should they unfortunately become heated" (p.26). Suzuki goes on to argue specifically that the weapon of choice for the Japanese is the English language and that for English to be a truly effective weapon in the global economic struggles of the future, the Japanese need to work tirelessly at improving their training and mastery of it.

Anyone with an interest in ESL or English for Special Purposes who has visited Japan in the last five years will recognize that the Japanese, almost <u>in toto</u>, are doing just that. Japanese students take a minimum of six years of English. NHK airs as much as two hours of English Language instruction daily; English tutors are in very high demand; English language institutes are proliferating; every office building in every major city in Japan seems to have at least one English language school, and the population of Japanese studying English in the US has increased dramatically over the last few years. For example,

in 1987-88 approximately 6000 Japanese were enrolled in intensive English programs in the US. In 1988-89 that number rose to 9000+, a jump of 50% in one year (Zikopoulos, 1989, p. xiii).

Suzuki, then, appears to be correct in claiming English language competence as particularly important to a Japan which is increasingly exporting to other countries not only its products and technology but also its personnel - managers, engineers, and marketers. It is these business people who comprise perhaps the most important contingent of the metaphoric army Mr. Suzuki's article brings to mind. It is they, even more than politicians and diplomats, who wield the weapon of English throughout the world. This essay addresses the place of English language training in Japan's move toward corporate internationalization. Specifically, the questions of the importance of English, the nature and quality of training, and the ramifications of that training with regard to global competition are addressed.

WHY ENGLISH?

Though "Internationalization" has only recently become a buzzword in and with regard to Japan, we should not forget that "Internationalization is a concept that has held the imagination of the Japanese people for the hundred years and more since the opening of their country at the time of the Meiji restoration" (Yamamoto, 1988, p.12). First they went abroad to discover the Western institutions and economic/industrial techniques which would enable them rapidly to take their place in the modern

world. This phase of internationalization, which Eleanor Westney has so insightfully documented in Imitation and Innovation (1987), is particularly interesting because even though the Japanese were borrowing extensively from the West, they were adapting those borrowings and using them in a very insular, Japanese fashion. In short, what they borrowed they brought home, used at home, and, for the most part, stayed at home to use. The most recent phase of internationalization, however, is very different. Owing to a multitude of forces, particularly a strong yen, high real estate and production costs, and the ever increasing cash surplus of Japanese corporations, the Japanese are now actually moving outside of Japan on at least a semi-permanent basis. They are now manufacturing in, establishing marketing offices in, and selling specific services, such as off-shore gas and oil rig construction, to other countries. The Japanese, a markedly insular people, have, because of their economic success, been forced to join the world (see also Saegusa, 1989). But how - in what language - are they dealing with that world?

As Suzuki notes(p.26) and many Japanese readily admit, the Japanese language is not suited for the sort of confrontation, debate, and negotiation typical of common non-Japanese business situations. Consequently, recognizing this linguistic handicap, the Japanese have approached the problem of international communication in a typically pragmatic fashion. Japan is an island nation who's very existence depends on effective

international commerce, and at least from the Japanese perspective, English has clearly emerged as the language which drives international commerce. Consequently, given the distribution, total number of speakers (@700mn -1bn), and total area where English is used, it should come as little surprise that Japanese educators and business executives alike have determined the mastery of English a priority. As Saegusa remarks, "If they [Japanese corporations] cannot secure a sufficient number of English-speaking employees, they will certainly be left behind in the stiff international business race" (1989 , p. 1).

ENGLISH TRAINING: PRE-COLLEGE

The priority status of English is reflected by the fact that it is a required subject for Japanese students who take six years of English (three years in junior high school and three years in high school). Two more years are required for college students. So, by the time a college graduate enters the workforce, he/she has probably had eight years of formal training, not counting private tutoring, in English.

However, even though a substantial amount of time is spent in Japanese schools on English, the results are not what would be expected. In fact, the Japanese have gained a certain notoriety for having weak production skills despite their extensive study of the language. There are, of course, many reasons for this situation, but two have been consistently brought to my attention

by the Japanese themselves. First, Japanese culture is not extremely verbal. As opposed to many other cultures, speaking up, speaking out, and speaking spontaneously are not highly valued. As one Japanese proverb says, "The mouth is a source of trouble" (Johnston, 1980, p. 65). Second, though there are certainly exceptions, English training in Japanese schools is conservative. Typically English is taught by Japanese instructors (rather than native speakers) who rely on the grammar-translation method. This is essentially the way most of us were taught Latin. The desired result is the accurate translation of a passage from English to Japanese and vice versa (Haneda, 1989). Such training tends to result in students with solid grounding in English structure and weak communicative skills.

ENGLISH TRAINING FOR BUSINESS: COLLEGE

After high-school, English training is continued in Japanese colleges where students are required to study the language two more years. In addition to the standard array of literature and linguistics courses offered by colleges, business English is also a presence in the collegiate curriculum. There are at least two national societies which support college level Business English in Japan, The Japan Business English Association, established in 1934, and the Japan Association for Practical English. Many of the members of both societies have been trained in the US or England, and quite often their mastery of English is exceptional.

There are also, of course, a number of native English speakers who teach business English in Japanese Universities. However, despite the excellent training and ability of the faculty, college level business English training suffers from many of the same problems as pre-college English training. The basic pedagogic form is still the grammar-translation model. Classes are large, often seventy-five to ninety students, and the basic Japanese instructional model -- as much as ninety minutes of uninterrupted lecture by the instructor with no comment from the students -- prevails. Though there are exceptions, the generally expressed intent of college business English is to prepare students to execute the correspondence and paperwork essential to international import/export activities. In short, as one Japanese scholar notes, "business English in Japan means foreign-trade English for *shosha* (trading companies)"(Mukoh, 1987). The case method is not widely used, nor is business communication commonly taught as a management tool.

Thus, college level Business English training in Japan is still conservative, emphasizing the reading and translation skills essential to carry out the paperwork for import/export. This process is not conducive to producing the English communication skills essential for effective international managers and corporate representatives of whatever sort. As Johnston noted in 1980 "One of the major communication problems for the Japanese is their inability to use English as a functional language" (p. 68). Despite an intense emphasis on

English over the last ten years, things haven't changed dramatically.

Interestingly, though, many Japanese business communication instructors themselves perceive their curriculum as flawed and are working to make it more effective. These educators express a desire to see more extensive use of cases, increased student participation, more extensive instruction in English, and an increased emphasis on effective general communication. Some are already implementing such changes in both their introductory courses and in their smaller seminars. Prof. Mukoh, an eloquent spokesperson for change in Japanese Business Communication voices the feelings of many Japanese Business Communication professionals when he writes:

> There is a growing need to transform the conventional "business English" courses currently being taught in Japan at the college level into "effective business communications in English" courses if we hope to train the students to become effective communicators who will be able to maintain and facilitate the further advances of Japanese international business activities. (1987, p. 70)

ENGLISH TRAINING FOR BUSINESS: CORPORATE

> Cars to love the world over. . . . The entire globe is a stage for Toyota" (Toyota Promo. Brochure, p. 26).
>
> To recognize our responsibilities as industrialists, to foster progress, to promote the general welfare of society, and to devote ourselves to the further development of world culture (Matsushita Electrical Industrial Co, Basic Objectives, adopted March 1929).

With regard to Japanese corporations, the quotations above may be multiplied many times over. The basic message is perfectly clear: Japanese companies see themselves in a global context. And, if it may be said that there is a national mandate in Japan for the citizenry to become proficient in English, it may be further said that the corporations are in the vanguard of that movement. At a recent orientation speech for freshman hires at one of the world's largest electronics firms, the CEO delivered the entire welcoming speech in English (Aramaki, 1989). This was done with the express intent of sending the new employees a message about the importance of English proficiency in this organization. For firms as large as Matsushita and as small as Tohoku Electric, management level employee English proficiency, though nominally "voluntary," is essentially required. But, just how are these requirements implemented, and what do they really mean?

First, with regard to corporate English training, some general observations are important. It should be noted that where educational institutions are conservative, the corporations have both the money and the need to be very progressive re English language training. Thus, for the corporations the buzzword is "communicative" English which emphasizes practical speaking and listening skills. However, even though the corporations have essentially accepted the need for English proficiency, there is great variety in the scope and type of English training conducted by companies.

For example, even for some very large multinationals, English training is considered voluntary which means that employees are expected to take care of the need themselves by seeking training on their own time at their own expense. Or if the employees are assigned to an operation in an English speaking area, the company will contract with local educational institutions, either in Japan or in the host country, for English training. Most commonly, however, companies provide their employees a variety of English training options ranging from correspondence-type courses to intensive in-house training. The training is determined by the proficiency of the employee and his/her anticipated need for English. The following program, in place at a large, extensively diversified multinational steel company, is representative of corporate English training programs.

English Training in A Multinational Steel Company

This program is operated by a spin-off company of the parent organization. It is responsible for training parent company employees, development of training materials, and development of external training programs for subsidiary companies and non-affiliated groups. Exhibits 1 & 2 outline the language training programs provided for employees.

EXHIBITS 1 & 2 HERE

The director of this program informed me that his company was internationalizing quickly and that to do so effectively employees must develop four things in rank order:

1. A high level of technical expertise.
2. International communication skills with a particular emphasis on English.
3. For foreign assignments: an awareness of host country conditions vis a vis politics, law, business, capital and labor.
4. For foreign assignments: a general awareness of the basic structures of the host country's culture. (Iida, 1989)

As is apparent from the exhibits, this company's English program is comprehensive and sophisticated. The instructors are all native speakers, approximately fifty percent American and fifty percent British and Australian. The emphasis is on "communicative" English, and this program, like those of most of the corporations, has adopted and adapted much from some of the most successful ESL operations in the US and Britain. The regular courses are conducted before work every morning. This is a common practice, but it varies both from company to company and from course of study to course of study. In addition to the "in-house" training, there are two overseas training courses - three months and two years (see exhibit 1).

Though there are, of course, many variations, this company's course of English study is relatively typical of large Japanese corporations. Some use the TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication), developed by ETS, to determine their employees' proficiency while others use an in-house test much like the TOEIC. Interestingly, though, the ubiquitous and dreaded TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) is not much in use because the corporate community doesn't consider it effective in measuring actual communication skills. In this company, though, all newly hired graduates must take the TOEIC exam, and the TOEIC scores determine the employee's starting point with regard to English training. The corporate target is to get *all management personnel* above the program level C (see exhibits). Since 1985, new hires must test to level C within two years of hiring in. I was told that there was "no punishment" for not meeting this goal, but that if it was not achieved, certain positive things would not happen or would be slower to occur. This stance was typical of all the corporations I queried regarding incentives or dis-incentives for English training.

The above program is relatively typical of an "in-house" operation at one of the larger multinationals. But, it should also be noted that much corporate training is handled by private consultants, language training schools, and by essentially para-governmental institutions such as the Institute for International Studies and Training. IIST was initially run by the government

but has recently gone private. It is a special training facility for both government and corporate employees which offers a full range of study including English language training (Scruggs, 1989). The point, though, is quite simply that corporate Japan has determined that employee English proficiency is important, and both the country and the corporations have committed an impressive array of resources toward achieving that goal.

ENGLISH TRAINING FOR BUSINESS: IMPLICATIONS

At this point, though, I should imagine that the foremost question any reader concerned with international business would be asking is "so what?" Why should I be interested in Japan's commitment to employee English language training?

That "so what" is answered by the fact that an understanding of both the commitment to English training and the actual training itself provide us a very real, objective manifestation of many of the qualities of Japanese business which Westerners have determined make Japan such a formidable competitor. Specifically, studying Corporate English training offers a small but relatively clear window on such Japanese corporate values as: global vision, long range planning, and flexibility. Let me briefly discuss the insights English training can offer us on each of these items.

GLOBAL VISION and LONG RANGE PLANNING

Despite an increasingly sophisticated formal - technical understanding of how Japanese business works, there persists in the US a state of dismay, or at least suspicion, regarding Japan's effective global presence. Even though we now have access to superb studies of Japanese management techniques, Japanese industrial strategy and so on, American business continues to harbor a subliminal belief that the Japanese are succeeding because of unfair advantage coupled with mystical oriental techniques. Often, the Japanese themselves contribute to this attitude through their persistent and frequently voiced belief that they are a "special" people - purer, different, and perhaps superior to other peoples. Many Japanese hold that our skewed vision is the result of racism. On the other hand, some observers argue that it is a hold-over from our post WWII relationship with Japan while others say that it is simply the product of our national provincialism. Regardless of the source, an awareness of the Japanese corporate attitude toward English can help us to rectify and adjust our conceptualization of Japan as a global competitor. How? First, American business people should recognize that basic English proficiency for management level employees in most Japanese multinationals is corporate policy. In many corporations English is essentially required not for a very small group of select employees but for nearly all management level employees. And the corporations annually commit substantial sums of money, time, and personnel to the end of

achieving this policy. Recognizing this point is critical to our grasp of Japan's intent to internationalize because, from an American perspective, it is so outrageous. First, this policy demands an essentially non-productive activity from a large segment of the work force. In most cases it pays the employee to engage in this activity, and in some cases the employees being trained will never have to use the English.

Second, it is a long-term process. Language learning is time-intensive, and as the exhibits note, some companies even provide certain employees lengthy overseas English training. This sort of activity does not accord with the US conception of the bottom-line. However, it does accord very well with the vision held by a corporate community which lives and dies by international trade and has determined that the language which now drives and will continue in the future to drive international trade is English. For Japanese corporations, the expense of the training is justified and will be repaid in employees who are more effective in the global arena. The general requirement is in tune with the typical Japanese group orientation, but it also serves the pragmatic function of creating a body of employees who, at need, can be rotated out of the country and quickly brought up to speed in communicative English.

Recognition of this commitment of money and time to employee training in what might appear to an American as a non-essential skill should drive home the point that the Japanese are totally committed over the long run to creating, from the ground up, an

international commercial machine, not only in terms of products but also in terms of human resources.

FLEXIBILITY

Flexibility is surely one of the most important underpinnings of Japanese business. Over the years anecdotes have abounded on this subject, particularly concerning the post-war years when company after company stopped building tanks or fighter planes and used existing wartime technology and equipment to produce small motorcycles, musical instruments, and so on. However, this flexibility and willingness to adapt to need have not ceased with the increasing economic security of Japan. They are, in fact, very much alive today, and Japanese corporate policy regarding employee English training is a strong and current manifestation of these qualities. Specifically, regarding English training, the Japanese are doing what they did so effectively after the war. They have recognized a deficiency - a national language which is not suited to international commerce - and determined that they will, en masse, learn the language which is most important on the international scene. However, this step, which is only the rational response to a deficiency, is also only the first and most basic step they have taken. The quality of flexibility comes in to play when they turn the process of redressing that deficiency into a positive, possibly even a profitable, part of their corporate activity.

To that end, a very interesting phenomenon is taking place in Japan. Many corporations who, of necessity, have started

large English language training programs have taken some innovative steps toward making that training profitable in a number of ways. First, several large companies have actually taken their training units and spun them off into separate companies with separate budgets and operating mandates. Three of the organizations which I personally visited have as their mission the general human resources development of the parent company, including English training, and, as such, are essentially cost centers. However, they also offer training to subsidiary companies and to non-affiliated corporations and individuals, an activity which has turned many of these spin-offs into profit generators.

Second, some of these corporations have taken the necessity of English training and used that necessity as a catalyst for research and development. One such company has recently developed and released an impressive CD-ROM language training system which necessitated the design and production of extremely sophisticated hardware and software. This system is designed for institutional and corporate use. This R&D effort is also reflective of Japanese business in that it resulted in a "cradle to grave" product which now provides hardware and software, and through the spin-off company, has both a built in market and an external market as well. On the other end of the scale, this same company has also designed inexpensive, low-tech systems for survival language skills, targeted for a broader market.

Finally, Japanese corporations have also used the necessity

of English language training to develop their positive image and to increase international awareness by establishing culture centers (which also conduct language training) and through providing regular, but informal, seminars in cross-cultural business communication for local business people at a nominal fee. Such companies as SONY, JAL, and Fuji-Xerox have a variety of such programs and have used them very effectively to increase awareness of Japanese culture and to promote a positive image both with the international business community and with the international public in general.

CONCLUSIONS

As one member of a joint Japanese/American research project, I initially studied "Japanese Management: Myths and Realities." In three years of working with my Japanese colleagues on this topic, it became apparent that despite the current level of knowledge about Japanese business practice, too much of both the American business community and the public at large still fell back on an essentially "mythical" vision of Japan Inc. when forced to account for Japanese success in the global arena. By focussing my present study of Japanese industry on a small element of Japanese industrial policy, I hoped to provide a narrow but clear window on Japanese business which would help in the de-mythologizing process.

The basic point is that there is no magic. The Japanese do not succeed globally because of any inherent superiority as a

people, because of oriental magic, or, finally, even because they've mastered the development and manipulation of the "uneven playing field." The Japanese are succeeding globally, first, because they have a global vision which they have aggressively pursued. Second, their response to this vision is clearly more consistently pro-active than reactive. In short, they have a strategy. Corporate English training, in general, is just one element of the strategic response to their global vision. It is an element, however, which provides us an accessible, clearly delineated analog to some of the key qualities of Japanese business which provide for effective global competition: total long-range commitment, flexibility, and a recognition of the importance of human capital. The Japanese have become famous for their attention to detail, and English training is merely one detail of the strategy by which corporate Japan is effecting its global vision. However, those of us who intend to compete with the Japanese could learn much by paying closer attention to their commitment to such details.

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TOEIC

Level	Composite Proficiency	Reading	Writing	Conversation
A 990 § 830	A person at this level can communicate freely about ideas related to his work and about other general topics.	A person at this level can read general materials and technical materials related to his work with ease. He can quickly read and accurately understand complicated contracts, newspaper editorials, etc.	A person at this level can freely express himself in writing on general subjects and on technical matters in his field of work. He is able to write with almost no grammatical errors, using natural English expressions.	A person at this level can participate freely in general discussions and technical negotiations in his field of work. His pronunciation, intonation and idiomatic usage are similar to those of a native speaker.
B 825 § 690	A person at this level can communicate fairly freely about ideas related to his work.	A person at this level can understand most job-related materials. He can also correctly comprehend political, economic and technical news articles.	A person at this level has only little trouble in writing about job-related topics. He is able to express himself in a rather natural way with only occasional grammatical errors.	A person at this level can participate well in job-related discussions and negotiations. Although he makes mistakes at times and tends not speak concisely, he is able to communicate well with native speakers.
C 685 § 550	A person at this level can make himself generally understood in matters relating to his work.	A person at this level can comprehend the meaning of most job-related materials and business letters, with the occasional use of a dictionary. Given enough time, he can also almost fully understand political, economic and technical news articles.	A person at this level can explain general job-related topics in business letters etc. with the occasional use of a dictionary. His expressions tend to be literal word-for-word translations, however, and sometimes contain grammatical mistakes.	A person at this level can give explanations and express most of his thoughts on job-related topics. He is generally able to respond to questions but has problems understanding complicated and/or fast speech.
D 545 § 380	A person at this level can communicate simple ideas related to his work to some extent.	A person at this level, with the help of a dictionary, can understand simple job-related materials and business letters. He can comprehend simple newspaper articles on sports, local news, etc. to some extent.	Using a dictionary, a person at this level can compose simple business letters and job-related explanations. He makes rather many grammatical mistakes in tense and number and is apt to misuse the irregular verbs.	A person at this level can express simple ideas about his job to some extent. His speech is generally limited to slowly delivered, simple sentences.
E 375 § 0	A person at this level can, with difficulty, communicate and comprehend simple things.	A person at this level can, with difficulty, read simple materials and letters, but only if he uses a dictionary. He can, again with difficulty, grasp the gist of newspaper articles on sports, local news, etc.	Using a dictionary, a person at this level can construct simple sentences. He makes frequent mistakes, in grammar as well as spelling.	A person at this level can, with difficulty, make simple greetings and relay easy messages. He is not able to quickly come up with even simple conversational expressions.

EXHIBIT 2: LINGUISTIC EVALUATION STANDARDS FOR A MULTINATIONAL STEEL COMPANY

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Employee Foreign Language Training Program Corresponding to Different Linguistic Proficiency Levels (Head Office)

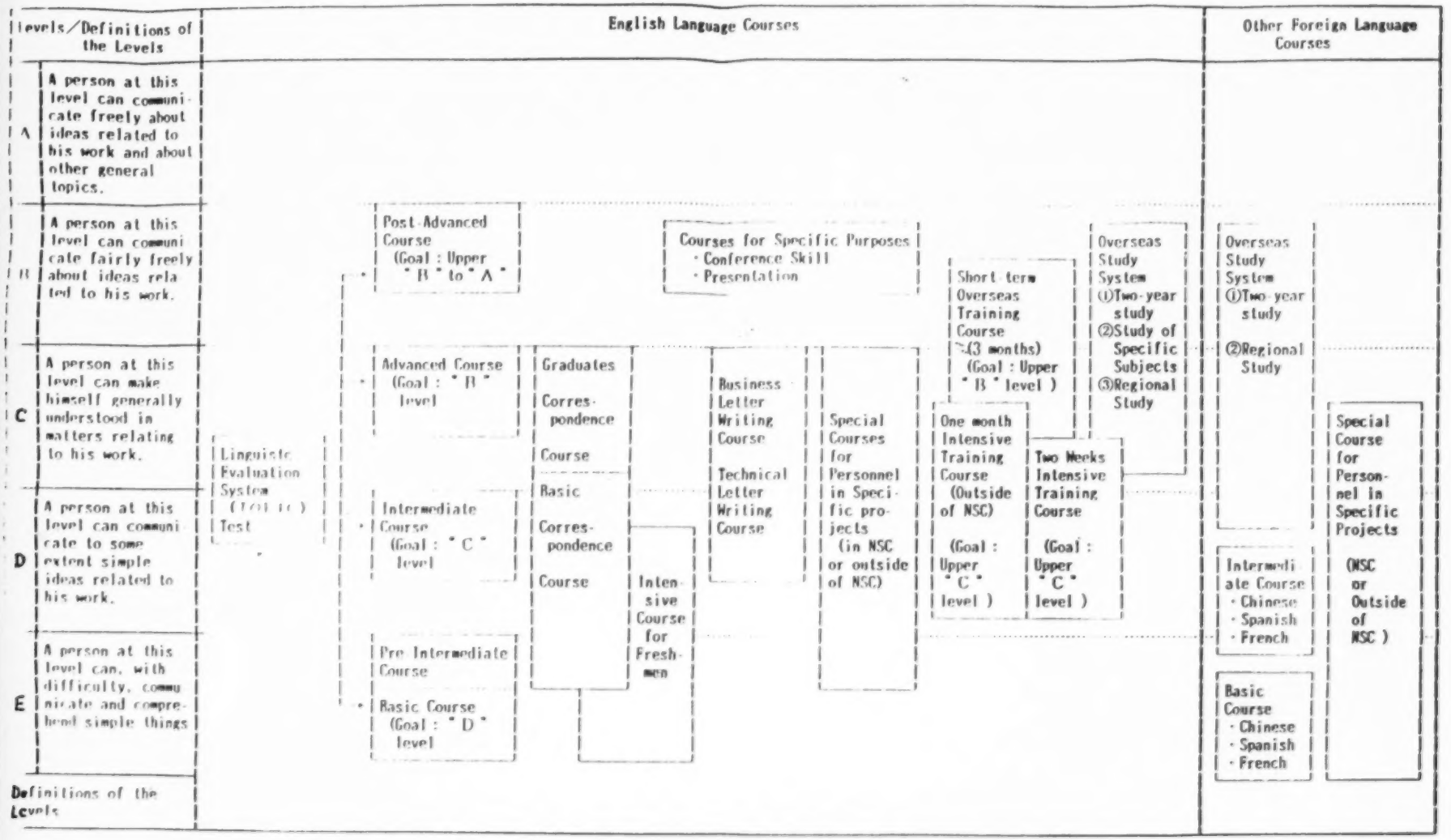
Levels/Definitions of the Levels
English Language Courses
Other Foreign Language Courses
A
A person at this level can communicate freely about ideas related to his work and about other general topics.
B
A person at this level can communicate fairly freely about ideas related to his work.
C
A person at this level can make himself generally understood in matters relating to his work.
D
A person at this level can communicate to some extent simple ideas related to his work.
E
A person at this level can, with difficulty, communicate and comprehend simple things
Definitions of the Levels
Linguistic Evaluation System (TOEIC) Test
Post-Advanced Course (Goal : Upper "B" to "A")
Advanced Course (Goal : "B" level
Intermediate Course (Goal : "C" level
Pre Intermediate Course
Basic Course (Goal : "D" level
Graduates Correspondence Course
Basic Correspondence Course
Intensive Course for Freshmen
Courses for Specific Purposes
· Conference Skill
· Presentation
Business Letter Writing Course
Technical Letter Writing Course
Special Courses for Personnel in Specific projects (in NSC or outside of NSC)
Short-term Overseas Training Course (~3 months) (Goal : Upper "B" level)
One month Intensive Training Course (Outside of NSC) (Goal : Upper "C" level)
Two Weeks Intensive Training Course (Goal : Upper "C" level)
Overseas Study System ①Two-year study ②Study of Specific Subjects ③Regional Study
Overseas Study System ①Two-year study ②Regional Study
Intermediate Course · Chinese · Spanish · French
Basic Course · Chinese · Spanish · French
Special Course for Personnel in Specific Projects (NSC or Outside of NSC)

EXHIBIT 1: EMPLOYEE LANGUAGE TRAINING COURSES FOR A MULTINATIONAL STEEL COMPANY